

Conservation of Australia's Forest Fauna (Second Edition)

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The first thing anyone will notice about this book is its size; 1070 pages weighing in at 3.36 kilograms. I have been a bit tardy and more than a little hesitant to write a review of this book, since I have always made it a strict point to only write a review if I had read the entire publication. With this book, in some cases I did not get beyond the abstract. Like most people approaching a multi-author volume of wide scope, I first read those papers dealing with my own speciality (mammals), then looked for reviews of broader areas and finally at papers with catchy titles (of which there are an extraordinary number in this book). Some of those titles can be a bit misleading. I went straight to "Echidnas and archaeology: understanding the Aboriginal values of forests in NSW" only to find the echidna got only a brief mention. Most of the essay was concerned with exploring "... recent developments in the management of Aboriginal values in (forests of NSW)". That doesn't really make much sense, nor does a concluding observation that "Research and planning cannot be divorced from the reality of people's strong feelings about social justice". I think I prefer Lord Kelvin's remark (as quoted by W. Braithwaite on p. 524) that "If you can't measure it, it's not science".

Many of the accounts are essays rather than 'papers' in the research sense. I suspect the editor probably encouraged a less formal approach, which can lead, especially in reviews, to a much more readable work.

The book is divided into five sections, and I will deal with them in sequence.

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES.

M. Calver and G. Wardell-Johnson probably identify the underlying issue apparent throughout the book in one sentence – "ESFM cannot be achieved ... without a ... will to assert long-term sustainable practice in the face of short-term goals" ESFM is, by the way, Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management. This section of the book contains many acronyms, arising no doubt from the fact that many of the authors are working in governmental units of ever-changing acronyms (does DNR= DPNIR and

what is NP&WS today?). I have always, as an editor, been very suspicious of any manuscript submitted that contained more than four acronyms. There is one essay here, which I shall kindly not name, that manages four in one sentence.

H. Parnaby and E. Hamilton-Smith manage to encapsulate in one sentence, without a single acronym, the point of several entire essays that follow. They write: "... conservation of Australia's forest bats has everything to do with cultural, political and corporate influences, and very little to do with biological 'facts'". They go on to describe the strange phenomenon of the "Adaptable bat".

Other highlights in the section include a discussion of "predictor sets" of invertebrates by R.L. Kitching. A very different type of research to that employed by most biologists is used by S.M. Legg, who examined 19,000 newspaper items in order to determine how wildlife was portrayed in Victoria 1839-1948.

Surprisingly, my personal award for the most interesting, and perhaps the most significant for conservation, essay in this section goes to a lawyer. I am sure J. Prest is a lawyer because the essay uses footnotes instead of the usual Harvard system of citation. And in true legal style they often take up half the page. However the topic is vital in regard to the 87% of NSW native vegetation that is on private land and to the lack of control of deforestation on private land as opposed to crown land. This is the best coverage of the legislation (and lack of legislation) relating to private native forestry I have seen. The vital point is made that environmental laws remain mere words on paper without sufficient implementation and enforcement. Certainly in western NSW, what little legislation that is applicable is rarely applied to rural landholders. Many rural landholders can of course make effective use of public and political avenues of resistance to anything that seems to endanger their short-term interest. A good example in NSW is the reaction to the Native Veg. Act.

Harry Recher, for example, has long argued that wildlife management and conservation must be extended to private land, an important aspect of

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forest conservation that is examined in several places in this book. There is, by the way, a very interesting contribution by H. Recher at the start of this section (on eucalypt forest birds).

LOOKING ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

The title of this section doesn't really tell what it contains, which is probably reasonable as it is a very mixed bag. A lot of information about techniques can be found herein. For example, P.C. Catling and N.C. Coops give examples of the use of airborne videography in forest management. C.P. Catterall et al. deal with quantification, including design issues, of the biodiversity values of reforestation. D. Milledge suggests an innovative approach to conservation planning in forests based on large owl territories.

This section also includes a really good review of the role of nutrition in conservation of marsupial folivores by B.D. Moore et al.

SINGLE SPECIES STUDIES

The papers in this section are mostly reports of the kind of studies familiar to field biologists. Species covered are koalas (of course), tiger quolls, brush-tailed phascogales, western ringtail possums, squirrel gliders and swift parrots.

Subsequent papers don't really deal with single species but with larger groups. Individual papers deal with 26 species of feathered fruit-eaters, two frogs (southern barred and giant burrowing), a small mammal community of nine species, two gliders (yellow-bellied and mahogany) and the entire mammal fauna in SE forests. A paper on bats in state forests is probably out of place here since it deals with management and really belongs in the next section.

MANAGING FOREST FAUNA

Having found some of the essays related to management in the first two sections of the book heavy going, I approached this final section with considerable trepidation. However, many of the papers in this section contain an amazing amount of information and are oriented more towards the data on which management should be based rather than the management process itself. Two very interesting sets of data concern the effects of *Phytophthora* dieback on forest fauna (M.J. Gerkaldis et al.) and the effects of fire on fungus species which are an important component of the diet of many forest animals (A.W. Claridge and J.M. Trappe). The latter is very much a management issue in that an assumed beneficial effect of fuel-reduction burns on fungi has, in my own experience, been used as a justification of the practice.

Dan Lunney closes the book with a summary entitled 'The future of Australia's forest fauna revisited' in which he states the aim of this second edition is to enhance the opportunities to communicate. The book has achieved that aim admirably and the credit for that must go to the editor.

I strongly recommend this book to conservationists, biologists and especially forest and fauna managers. After all, it is only \$25 a kilo including postage; I've paid more than that for cheese.

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Sydney
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